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INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORP
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUCOCGA/COMLANTAREA COGARD PORTSMOUTH VA
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0983

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 COTONOU 000944

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: BENIN U.S. COAST GUARD ISPS COMPLIANCE TEAM VISIT CONCERNED
ABOUT PORT OF COTONOU

REF: COTONOU 744 and previous

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY: A four-man US Coast Guard delegation led by Mr. Peyton Coleman visited Benin August 27-30, 2006 to assess the Port of Cotonou's security and compliance with the International Shipping and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. The team's unofficial findings are that the Port of Cotonou is currently not in substantial compliance with ISPS standards. In addition to meeting with the Minister of Transportation, the team and embassy personnel met with officials of the Port of Cotonou (Port Autonome de Cotonou - PAC) and the Ministry of Transportation's Department of the Merchant Marine, which is charged with ISPS implementation. END SUMMARY

Meetings with Minister, ISPS/Port Officials and Site Visit

12. (SBU) The team met with a number of GOB ISPS and PAC officials, and had a frank and open dialogue with GOB interlocutors. Minister of Transportation, Mr. Alexandre Dossou commended the USCG's visit as consistent with President Yayi's ambitious plans to make the Port of Cotonou the most competitive port in West Africa. Dossou said this goal cannot be achieved without proper security measures at port facilities and underlined the GOB's commitment to emphasizing improved security.

13. (SBU) The port's Director General, Mr. Christophe Aguessy, and the Director of the Merchant Marine, Ms. Rahanatou Anki Dossou, briefed the team on Benin's achievements since the ISPS code has come into force. There have been a number of training sessions for port stakeholders and personnel, an increase in the height of the port's fences, efforts to improve access control to the port, training of 25 security agents in Antwerp and Marseille, and the selection of a Canadian consulting firm to develop security, improve lighting, and construct a guard tower.

14. (SBU) After a good round of meetings with GOB and port officials, the USCG team toured the port and found the situation on the ground fell well short of both their expectations and ISPS standards. The port is congested with trucks and little to no effort is being made to restrict access to the port or otherwise mandate use of badges or other forms of identification. Signage regarding security conditions and access procedures is inadequate, the trees alongside the port's fences pose an access risk, and the port holds no drills nor security exercises on a regular basis.

¶15. (SBU) During the USCG team's visit, the port issued new regulations to ease vehicle congestion within the port and to better control landside access to the port by both vehicles and individuals. The new measures, which went into effect on September 16, require trucks to spend no more than 48 hours at the port or pay a fine of USD 970 (CFA 500,000) a day. All authorized port visitors and persons employed at the port will be required to wear badges and armbands or be denied access. Among the challenges the port faces at present is financing the acquisition of radio, firefighting and pollution control equipment, surveillance cameras, and other high-tech equipment (Comment: Some of this equipment will be provided by MCC funding under MCC's "Access to Markets" project, worth nearly \$170 million over five years, which is focused on the port).

USCG's findings and recommendations

¶16. (SBU) Through question and answer sessions with the Port Authority, Merchant Marine officials, the COMAN (MAERSK) terminal manager, the Benin shippers association, and a site visit to the port facilities, the USCG team has concluded that the Cotonou Port Authority does not meet the minimum requirements of the ISPS code. One glaring oversight was that the terminal manager COMAN (MAERSK) was unaware there was a unified security plan for the port.

¶17. (SBU) The team did note some strong points in port security practices, including separation of public fishing and commercial port activities, segregation of the oil and LPG terminals from other port facilities, and port officials' efforts (even if lacking) to provide information and training about the ISPS code to port stakeholders. The team invited the GOB/port officials it met to make a reciprocal visit to a port in the U.S. to learn more about American experiences in port security. (Comment: Senior PAC staff visited the Port of Baltimore in February 2006 with MCC officials.)

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¶18. (SBU) Port Director Aguessey was sobered by the USCG team's assessment of Cotonou's security standards. He said he looked forward to receiving the final conclusions of the USCG's findings in order to be more familiar with the Port's security flaws and to prepare corrective actions.

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